



Historical development of forest policy in Ethiopia: Trends of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization

Alemayehu N. Ayana^{a,b,*}, Bas Arts^b, K. Freerk Wiersum^b

^a Forestry Research Centre, Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research, P.O. Box 30708, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

^b Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group, Wageningen University, P.O. Box 47 6700 AA Wageningen, The Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyse and explain the historical development of forest policy in Ethiopia from post-World War II era up to present. The analysis was conducted by tracing competing ideas, interests, institutions, and power configurations over a period of time. A qualitative historical analysis method was employed to collect and interpret data along the analytical dimensions of the so-called Policy Arrangement Approach (discourse coalitions, rules, resources and power). The development of forest policy in Ethiopia exhibits a dynamic process of institutionalization and deinstitutionalization. The institutionalization and deinstitutionalization process was co-shaped by a complex interplay of structural factors such as national political orientation and economic priorities, environmental calamities; and the dynamics in the global forest related discourses. Forestry was, most of the times, marginalized or integrated into the dominant agricultural development paradigm, where the integration also failed to maximize the synergy between the two sectors. The findings indeed confirm the usefulness of Policy Arrangement Approach to understand and explain such nuanced and dynamic process of (policy) change and continuity.

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Introduction

The development of forest policy in Ethiopia is strongly intertwined with the evolution and vicissitude of its state structure. Although some accounts claim the beginning of modern Ethiopian state as early as the second-half of the 19th century, it is generally acknowledged that an organized and elaborated state structure only emerged after the Second World War (Bahiru, 1991; Teshale, 1995). Since then, the country went through a series of changes in its polity and politics. The long monarchical rule was replaced by the socialist dictatorship in 1974. Despite the differences in approach (the former used 'divine right' to legitimize its system of rule and the latter was guided by Marxist-Leninist ideology) both regimes were highly authoritarian and governed through centralized power structure (Ottaway, 1990; Young, 1997). The incumbent government that stepped to power following the demise of the socialist regime in 1991 espoused a markedly different system of governance – a decentralized federal polity and a democratic political process (Young, 1997; Vaughan, 2003). Parallel to changes in polity and politics, the principal economic policy also shifted

from a kind of 'laissez-faire', to a command economy, and to a free-market (Keller, 2002; Vaughan, 2003; Dessalegn, 1994, 2004). Those fluxes have had significant implication for the development of forest policy. Forest policy is broadly conceptualized in this study as a social and institutional arrangements designed to steer and guide the use and management of forests; which ranges from different regulatory instruments to a general framework defining fundamental assumptions, principles, objectives and priorities.

Although the incidences of deforestation and forest management interventions by the state was recorded since the beginning of twentieth century (Gebremarkos and Deribe, 2001), formal forest policy started in Ethiopia during the brief period of Italian annexation (1936–1941). Italians issued various forest laws and regulations and instigated the first structured forest administration called *Milizia Forestale* (Forest Militia) (Melaku, 2003). However, Italians were expelled from the country before adequately introducing their forestry policy. The predominant policy preoccupation of the so-called restored Imperial period (1941–1974) was 'modernization' following Western industrialized countries (Bahiru, 1991). Modernizing agriculture with emphasis on large scale commercial farming was sought to transform the country from agrarian to industrial economy. Forest development and conservation issues were mostly sidestepped during the restored Imperial period. However, after two decades of competitions between actors advocating different ideas and interest, the first

* Corresponding author at: Forestry Research Centre, P.O. Box 30708 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Tel.: +251 911 17 58 46/31 317 48 61 96/92.

E-mail addresses: alemayehu.ayana@wur.nl, alemayehunegassa@yahoo.com (A.N. Ayana), Bas.Arts@wur.nl (B. Arts), Freerk.Wiersum@wur.nl (K.F. Wiersum).

forest law within the country's sovereignty was issued in 1965 (Gebremarkos and Deribe, 2001; Melaku, 2003).

Nevertheless, forestry as an autonomous sector has come to high policy attention and institutional profile after mid-1970s when the socialist military council, popularly known as 'Derg', deposed the Imperial regime. The 1975 revolution induced land reform that extinguished all the pre-existing property rights to land and nationalized its holdings including private forests and large estates of agricultural farms. The national political and economic changes coincided with the rise of global fossil fuel prices and the associated energy crisis of the early 1970s that triggered the surge of interest in biomass energy as an alternative source (Arnold et al., 2003). Those international drives manifested in Ethiopia in a strong focus on production forestry and enhanced fuel wood plantations with exotic fast growing tree species (Davidson, 1989; Demel, 2001; Dessalegn, 2004; Mulugeta and Tadesse, 2010). Sizable flows of funds from donors earmarked to forest development and the enthusiasm of the socialist government towards the same end contributed for the establishment of what later become described as the 'strongest' forestry organization in the country's history. Following the 1984–1985 catastrophic drought and subsequent famine, the country's attention gradually shifted from production to multi-functional forests and a broader conceptualization of environmental conservation. Since mid-1990s and up until now both forestry and environmental conservation issues have been overshadowed by the thrusts of accelerated economic growth via agricultural intensification. Such shifts in attention were also reflected in institutional arrangements. For example, forestry as an autonomous sector has gradually disappeared from the scene without installing alternative institutions with similar functions and strengths (Yonas, 2001; Melaku, 2008; Berhanu, 2009; Tibebwa and Negusu, 2009).

This paper attempts to analyse and explain the historical development of forest policy in Ethiopia from post-World War II era up to present. It seeks to answer the following central questions: How has forest policy evolved and changed over time in Ethiopia? Which ideas have guided the changing process? Which interests have been served, by whom and what means? What forest institutions have been built over time? And to what extent have the national (forest) policies been co-shaped by the international forest related discourses? Analyzing the evolution of forest policy in Ethiopia offers an exceptional case that can add to our knowledge because (i) unlike many other African countries where colonial heritage laid its institutional foundation, Ethiopia has been an empire with a long history of independence, (ii) the country has experienced series of radical political changes only within four decades (from semi-feudal monarchy to socialist dictatorship, to decentralized democratic system) which have had impact on the development of forest policy, and (iii) forest policy experienced change during the authoritarian socialist regime that followed extreme shock events such as drought and subsequent famine. In light of these distinctive backgrounds, examining the development of forest policy in Ethiopia contributes towards a better understanding of how historical settings impact the dynamics of contemporary (forest) policy processes and practices. Moreover, this paper shed light on the mechanisms behind institutional change by introducing a new theoretical perspective to the field of policy analysis in Ethiopia. By doing so, unlike most previous studies that emphasize the stagnation of forest policy (Gebremarkos and Deribe, 2001; Yonas, 2001; Melaku, 2003, 2008; Tibebwa and Negusu, 2009), our analysis reveals a continuous and dynamic process of institutional transformation co-shaped by a complex interplay of national politico-economic orientation and global forest related discourses.

Analytical framework

The aim of this paper is to analyse the dynamics of forest policy over a certain period of time. It will do so by tracing competing ideas, interests, and institutions served by different parties over a period of time. The so-called Policy Arrangement Approach (from now on PAA) is taken as an organizing analytical framework to understand and explain the institutionalization and deinstitutionalization process of forest policy.

PAA was selected as analytical framework due to several reasons. First, PAA as elaborated by Van Tatenhove et al. (2000), Arts and Leroy (2006) and Arts and Buizer (2009) distinguishes four interrelated analytical dimensions (discourses, actors, power and rules) to understand policy practices, thus offering a comprehensive approach. Second, PAA is built on other policy theories in the field of institutional, network, and discourse analysis; thereby, it addresses agency, structure, interests and ideas in a dynamic perspective (Arts, 2006; Arts and Buizer, 2009). Third, although it has only recently been developed to study policy dynamics in the environmental field, PAA has already proven to be a suitable analytical tool in various policy fields, including environmental policy, rural development policy, natural resource and forest policy (see Van der Zouwen, 2006; Wiering and Arts, 2006; Buizer, 2008; Arts and Buizer, 2009; Veenman et al., 2009; De Boer, 2009). Fourth, PAA takes a midway position along the *agency-structure* continuum, thus, it connects the daily policy process in which actors interact with structural forces of social and political change (Van der Zouwen, 2006). In our case, for instance, PAA enables us to understand and explain the extent to which the institutionalization and deinstitutionalization process of forest policy has been shaped by changes in polity and politics.

Policy arrangement refers to the way in which a certain policy domain such as forest policy is temporarily shaped in terms of *discourses, actors, power and resources, and rules of the game* (Arts and Buizer, 2009; Arts and Leroy, 2006). Arts and Buizer (2009, p. 343) conceptualized *policy discourses* as 'interpretative schemes, ranging from formal policy concepts and texts to popular narratives and story lines, which give meaning to a policy issue and domain'. Ideas, concepts, and narratives that constitute discourses are continuously produced, reproduced, and transformed into a particular social and policy practices (Van Tatenhove et al., 2000; Arts and Leroy, 2006). In the policy arrangement approach, it is generally assumed that more than one competing discourse exist together at a time that enable actors to group together in coalitions to enhance certain discourses and challenge others. *Actors* are comparable to 'discourse coalition', as distinguished by Hajer (1995), and can be defined as a group of players who share a policy discourse as well as policy-relevant resources, in the context of the given rules of the game. *Power* refers to the dominance of one coalition over the other. It concerns about the ability of actors or actors' coalition to mobilize resources in order to realize their preferred policies (Arts and Buizer, 2009). The fourth dimension of policy arrangement – *rules of the game* – delineates a policy domain by defining the possibilities and constraints of actors to act within those boundaries or certain realms (Van Tatenhove et al., 2000). The rules of the game determine how politics is played and delineate the boundaries of policy coalitions (Arts and Buizer, 2009).

Often, a PAA analysis focuses on existing policy arrangements characterized by a specific institutional configuration at a given moment in time. However, this study particularly pays attention to the historical dynamics of change and continuity of such arrangements. Drawing on Van Tatenhove et al. (2000) and Van der Zouwen (2006) *institutionalization* is conceptualized in this study as a dynamic processes of 'construction and reconstruction' of policy arrangements, for example, when new ideas, concepts and narratives emerge, find their way into policy practices, and become

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